2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

262 to the different sexes, the matter becomes important from a nutritional point of view.

It may be said at once that the food taboo proper is not widely observed among these Central African people. The Bemba tribe is divided into clans named after various animals or plants, but in no case are totemic food taboos kept. In fact, in some cases the [614] clan name is that of one of the staple foods of the tribe (Besa—an archaic name for millet; Boa, or 'mushroom'). Nor does there seem to be any food tabooed to one sex or the other, or considered appropriate to any particular time of life. Certain individuals regularly abstain from one or more types of relish. [755] Such restrictions may be the result of an order given by a native doctor who may make a cure conditional on the regular observance [777] of a food taboo, or it may follow the individual's own conviction that a particular food eaten on some memorable occasion has brought him ill luck and is therefore likely to do so again. In some cases one whole family (*ulupwa*) may avoid one type of relish, but it is impossible to decide in these instances whether the individuals have a natural antipathy to one food or the other, or whether the taboo is based entirely on magic grounds.

262 Another set of taboos are observed by chiefs, in this case entirely
825 on animal food, and dependent on the belief in the magic properties
[777] of the animal. Animals with prominent lower teeth are unlucky.
[826 They are known as *ifinkuli* (sing. *icinkuli*)—the name given to children
847] whose lower teeth have come through before their upper, and who used to be destroyed on this account. Such animals include the bush-pig, the wart-hog, the zebra, and the eland. The bush-buck is also taboo to a chief because it has a mottled skin and makes a choking noise, and is therefore believed to bring danger or leprosy and bronchial troubles. The flesh of the bush-pig is also considered unsuitable since it darts from side to side, and this it is said might disturb the judgements of the chief. For similar magic reasons, pregnant women must avoid the flesh of the bush-buck, 'Because it is mottled. Does she want her child to be striped?'[1]

262 But it must be stated at once that the pregnancy taboos are not
843 nearly so numerous as among other African and Melanesian peoples, and both the taboos observed by the chiefs and by pregnant women are restrictions not on one type of food—vegetable or animal—but on one particular species of vegetable

[1] She must also avoid the *ifinkuli* and the wild cat.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

talk, but he had registered the memory for future use. He had, in fact, a vivid, if entirely selective, interest in the vegetation around him.

The natives' passionate enthusiasm for hunting adds another interest to their travel through the bush. To them the countryside can be roughly classified according to the type of game that is found there, and in ordinary speech the people describe an area by saying, for instance, that it is a land of elephants or hippos, or that it is a lechwe or reed-buck district. But apart from an interest based very largely on their craving for meat, the Bemba seem fascinated, like other African peoples, by the characteristic appearance and habits of the animals themselves—the fantastic size of the elephant, the laugh of the hyena, the ferocity of the lion or the crocodile. The hunter tracking his quarry through the bush is plainly keyed to a pitch of concentration watching for every sign of its tracks, but men and women simply travelling from one village to another will also seek for traces of game of any sort, just from their interest in the habits of the animals themselves. The different species of fish have not the same fascination for the majority of the Bemba, although they form quite an important source of food. But they seem deeply interested in the rivers of their country. They compare the value of different chieftainships, not only in terms of the game in each particular district, but also of its supplies of fish. Rivers are among the most striking landmarks in this country and form the natural boundaries of chiefs' territories. Each tributary stream, however small, has its name which is used to define the position of different villages in the neighbourhood, while the bigger rivers seem to be a source of aesthetic delight, though perhaps merely as the potential source of so much food. I noticed on different trips that carriers spoke with real enthusiasm of the size of any large river that we were about to reach, and I have heard the natives from one district compare their rivers braggingly with those of other areas. A knowledge of the exact course of different rivers is only gradually acquired by a travelled man and is much admired. I once heard a group of children under 12 arguing hotly as to the order in which different local streams flowed into the Manshya river nearby. The discussion became so heated that a series of bets were arranged as to the results. It was characteristic of a tribe with few material possessions that the wager should consist of a stated

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

CHAPTER XVI

FISHING AND HUNTING

FISHING and hunting will be discussed only cursorily in these pages. It is, however, necessary just to touch on these activities in order to be able to complete the economic calendar of work.

Fishing Methods.

The Bemba cannot be described as a fishing tribe. As a food, fish makes one of their favourite relishes, and is reckoned nearly as great a treat as meat. They catch fish whenever they can, and very much appreciate dried fish, but such food is regarded rather as a sudden piece of luck than as a regular article of diet, and fishing itself in a greater part of the country is an amusing pursuit, particularly when undertaken communally, rather than a serious means of getting one's livelihood. Among the neighbouring Bisa, a fishing tribe living on Lake Bangweolu, each fish is known by name and referred to as such, and every child in the community is able to pick out the different sorts correctly from a heap. But among the Bemba, though different types are recognized by the older men, the rest of the natives just speak of 'fish'. The Bisa regularly dry fish and trade it over the country. They have a fixed system of prices and reckon each catch carefully in terms of financial profit. The Bemba, on the other hand, only sell fish occasionally, at certain seasons of the year, and then by a process of casual barter. Apart from those who live by the banks of big rivers they are indifferent boatmen and handle clumsily the paddles of the dug-out canoes at river fords. Along the Chambesi, Luansenshi, and other big rivers there are, however, definite fishing villages recognized by the natives as such. These villages remain fixed in one position year in year out. Here we find fishing by one method or another going on all the year round, a complex system of ownership of weirs and rights of use of ponds, and special fishing ceremonies such as are not found over the rest of the plateau. The inhabitants of these villages are definitely specialist fishermen, distinguished by name as *umulonga* (plur. *abalonga*) and considered very exclusive and even dour by the rest of the Bemba. The latter discuss the habits of these fishermen as though they were almost a

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2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

magicians already described. Both are known as *ifibinda*. But naturally these specialist hunters are not common nowadays, since game restrictions prevent the killing of elephants—formerly their chief pursuit.

Every form of hunting has magic rites connected with it. Each hunter or setter of traps has his own charms (*ubwanga*) designed to make himself invisible, to draw the game to him, to slow its power of movement, &c. The animals themselves are thought to have magic attributes. Parts of their skin or bones are used as activating principles (*ifishimba*) in many charms or medicines, and many of them can only be hunted or killed after special ritual precautions have been taken to protect the hunter. All animals that attack or kill mankind are grouped in a special class known as *ifiswanga* (sing. *iciswanga*). These include the lion, leopard, cheetah, crocodile, hyena, or poisonous snakes, &c., and all these species are considered to have magic properties and to require ritual handling. Other animals are described as being *ifibanda* (sing. *icibanda*) or haunting spirits, or else are thought to turn into *ifibanda* when killed, and they are feared on that account. The bush-pig, bush-buck, hippo, rhino, eland and ant-bear are all *ifibanda*. Akin are the unlucky animals, e.g. those with the bottom teeth projecting or appearing first (*icinkula*, plur. *ifinkula*)[1] such as the zebra, the eland, haartebeest, or buffalo, which have no upper teeth in the middle of the jaw; the night owl (*ntiti mushi*) or the wild cat. None of these animals may be taken as tribute to a chief or eaten by a pregnant woman.

After killing one of the *ifiswanga* or *ifibanda*, the hunter must purify himself for fear the spirit of the animal will pursue him in dreams, bring him ill luck, or send him mad. This is also true of the elephant. The purification of a lion killer takes place at the chief's court and hereditary officials, the *Bamushika* (Kasenge and Cikutwe at Citimukulu's court), alone have the medicine required to wash the hunter.[2] But less elaborate rites are performed in the case of the leopard, crocodile, the caracal, and a bull eland with thick black tufts on its head. The ceremonies necessary after the killing of an elephant are described below.

[1] Children whose bottom teeth come through first are considered unlucky and are put to death.

[2] The *malaila* or war-song is also sung. I am indebted to Mr. T. Fox-Pitt and Mr. V. Brelsford for much confirmatory information on the magic properties of different animals.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

to protect the millet gardens. The same principle is followed in small snares such as the *namwilindi*, used to catch moles and wild cats round the neck, or for birds. These snares are sometimes baited. Running nooses (*ifiselela*) are set in apertures made in barricades of branches. A log is then hung by a fine bark strand above the only opening in the barrier and attached to a delicate trigger on the ground. A wild pig that touches the latter as it brushes through the aperture releases the rope so that the log falls on to its head. Guinea-fowl are also caught in the same way. Stone traps (*ifiliba*) are used for tiny animals such as rats and moles, a big round stone being balanced precariously by a stick which the slightest touch is sufficient to dislodge. Small wild birds like parrots are caught by small boys who put lime on twigs on which a running noose has been set.[1] The Bemba also used to dig large staked pits (*amacinga*, sing. *ubucinga*), about eight feet deep, into which big game sometimes fell, but are now forbidden by the Government to do so on the grounds that a child might fall into such a hole and be killed. All trapping and snaring is carried out sporadically by the Bemba, and it is difficult to believe that this method produces much game. During three years' residence, admittedly not in particularly good game country, I never saw a buck caught in a trap, though I have occasionally been brought snared guinea-fowl. As far as I know there are no religious or magic rites associated with the setting of traps.

(*c*) *Duiker whistle* (*ichinyenye*). Hunters after duiker (*mpombo*) use a small duiker horn with a paper-like membrane, taken from a certain spider's nest, over the aperture. The hunter blows into the horn and produces a short, shrill scream which is thought to imitate the duiker's call. The animal is said to answer the whistle, and the instrument is universally believed in. Its negative results in my presence were always said to be due to the hostile influence of the wrong sex. These horns are doctored by successful hunters, who sell the medicine necessary for their use, and the new owner must address the whistle: 'I got you from X, a famous hunter, by purchase or as a gift (i.e. I did not steal you), so do your duty accordingly. I have rolled on the ground before the spirits, and before Lesa, begging him to give me of his cattle.'[2] The *icinyenye* is therefore definitely a magic whistle.

[1] T. L. Fox-Pitt writes: Pied wag-tails must be released, as they bring bad luck to the village.

[2] I am indebted to the Rev. R. Macminn for this text.

The Ceremony

881 606 372 This was received with shocked protest, 'No, this isn't just ordinary fire. Alas, Mother! We can't use matches.' It seemed an impasse.

At last, to the intense relief of everyone, the wood shaving set to catch the sparks began to smoke and a little flame flickered up. Clapping broke out and cries of 'ulla! ulla!' saluted the new fire. It was a curiously moving moment because of the tenseness of the women packed tight on the floor of the hut through the long wait.

The rite is described shortly as 'to beg for parenthood' (*ukulomba ubufyashi*). The father's sister plays the leading part in [842] the ceremony and it is she who by tradition influences the fertility of the girl. 'The sticks must be rubbed on the back of the father's sister so that the girl will bear a child quickly.'

881 825 372 (As we have seen the lion is equated throughout this ceremony with the bridegroom, the chief, or the male principle. Two women when questioned about the song (No. 19) just said, 'The lion is a chief.' Fire is also equated with generation. The girl owes parenthood to the older women who have made fire for her, 'We say to the girl "We women have made your fire for you. We are in pain now. Our hands ache from the rubbing. You must take over now".')[1]

881 372 Twigs and sticks were deftly built round the young flame and a considerable fire began to crackle. Nangoshye crawled towards it on all fours with a water pot on her head. The two girls crawled behind her clasping their arms round her waist. All three lowered the water pot on to the fire with hands and teeth. I have no recorded comments on this part of the rite. I think it almost certainly symbolizes the heating of the marriage pot of the girl which is stood on the fire by an old woman with the bridegroom and bride clasping her waist. It may also signify the handing over of the fire from the old to the young as suggested in the comment above.

881 The seeds in the winnowing basket were now divided out so that each woman had a handful to cook. The remains were thrown into the big pot over the fire, the pot of the *namushimwa*. We all retired exhausted to our own quarters to eat for the first time since morning.

[834] [1] A.C. adds: 'You cannot beg fire from a woman in a different sexual condition. The girl must have a new fire after her chisungu. She must not have intercourse during menstruation.'

776 children to men and is the original source of magic power. *Lesa* is not, however, the object of any cult and is never directly addressed by the Bemba.(1) There is some suggestion that *Lesa* is believed to act as a judge of the dead, but it is not clear how far this is a reflection of Christian teaching.

[778] Shrines are put up in Bemba country to a hunting god, *Mulenga*, thought
[825] to be the spirit of a forgotten ancestor. There are also traces of serpent worship in two or three centres in Bemba country where sacrifices are made to pythons believed to live in caves or near waterfalls.

The Aushi believe in *Makumba*, a tribal god. While only chiefs and priests have seen him, he is generally thought to be small - about two feet in height - black and hard like stone. *Makumba* is very closely bound up with the idea of paramountcy among the Aushi but is clearly much more than mere "insignia of office"; he is worshipped and offerings are made to him; he is conceived both as a god and as a person, and is served by his own priests and priestesses. His association with the history of Aushi has already been mentioned. (See above p.8.)

(b) THE ANCESTRAL CULT

769 Some reference has been made in preceding sections to the ancestral spirits. Many ceremonies are connected with them and the part played by ancestral spirits in general and those of chiefs, and especially of the Paramount Chief, is the core of Bemba religion. These spirits (*Mupashi*, pl. *Imipashi*) are worshipped on all the chief occasions of the agricultural year, particularly at tree-cutting and harvest time, and also in times of tribal disaster or emergency. It may be remarked in passing that the ritual practices associated with these occasions were formerly very elaborate but are now being carried out with diminishing ceremonial and by fewer people, even though the beliefs behind the practices still seem to be dominant in the minds of the people.

769 The *Imipashi* are to be approached in certain well-defined ways among
778 which are the calling of their names, prayers, and offerings of material objects. They may be invoked at the following places: firstly, the hut of every householder serves as a shrine, since his own ancestral spirits tend to linger there in the half-light of dawn and dusk to be invoked at the crises of life: birth, marriage, illness and death. In some areas food is placed for their appeasement but there is not, as among the Ila, a separate part of the hut set aside for them. The focal point of religious activity in the village is the headman's hut or a small shrine built outside it. Here the spirits of the headman's ancestors are invoked in all matters concerning the wider welfare of the village. In some areas shrines are put up to the spirits of the former owners of the land who are addressed by the village headman.(2)

(1) The position described by Smith and Dale in *The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia* is very similar.

(2) Among the Unga priests operate independently of the chiefs; the fusion of secular and spiritual authority is not so complete as it is among the Bemba. For details see Brelsford, 5, 1946, Chap.XI.

9: Richards E-5 (1930-1934) 1935 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

789 found in a village of some 70 huts. These lay in a tumbled heap at the cross-roads outside the village, surrounded by knots of people, mostly young men and women, murmuring under their breath at the horrors from which they had been saved. These onlookers seemed to assume to a man that the horns were dangerous objects without exception. Excited comment identified this and that small object as coming from a dead man's grave, as almost certainly part of the bone of a sorcerer's victim, or as soaked in the blood of a dead child.

789 415 The actual analysis of these horns was therefore interesting. The collection included 45 small duiker horns, admitted by most to be used as containers for charms or medicines (*muti*) usually of a harmless type such as hunting magic. Sixteen were the horns of big buck such as roan antelope, the usual containers for medicine good and bad, and even for snuff or any other substance which needs to be carried in a stoppered vessel. It would be difficult, informants admitted, to tell a container of black magic from a simple box of snuff. Of the rest of the charms, 17 were small gourds (*misaſi*) used as containers for snuff or oil with a wooden stopper fixed in the narrow end. In such tiny gourds, magic of good luck or popularity is often carried (*muti na cisense*). Thirty-six more charms were the small cloth bags (*mikoba*) in which medicines of various sorts are sewn to be worn round the owner's neck, the *Bamucapi* themselves supplying their medicine in this form. Such medicines would be nearly always protective to the owner and not destructive to somebody else. To cut a long story short then, out of a collection of 135 horns which had drawn cries of horror and execration from the passers-by, 125 were mere containers, possibly filled with nothing more than the ordinary household remedies which the English mother keeps against coughs and digestive ailments.

789 [825] Of the remainder of the horns, some were admittedly doubtful or definitely suspicious. Five were wristlets made of the skin of the water lizard or the tree iguana, which are considered ill-omened animals.

[784] Nine were bush-buck horns, and this buck (*cisongo*) has a very bad reputation among the Babemba. The animal is believed to be a *cibanda* or evil spirit, and is tabooed to chiefs, to pregnant women, and

754 789 others. By such a horn a sorcerer would be able to lay the spirit of his victim, sending it flying through the air by night 'glowing like a white man's torch' (*lulebanga torchi*) to the grave of the recently buried